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HOME TRAINING OF THE BLIND CHILD

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THE HOME TRAINING OF THE BLIND CHILD

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Advice to Parents of a Blind Child

*Prepared by the Canadian National
Institute for the Blind*

NATIONAL OFFICE, 186 BEVERLEY STREET, TORONTO



If you have a blind child, try to realize that its life and future must depend almost entirely upon your intelligent care, love and devotion in its early years. If you educate and train it properly, it will grow up to be a happy and useful member of society, able to fulfil his or her duties in life to his or her satisfaction and your joy; but if you neglect or spoil it, it will develop into the tragic figure of the conscious defective, a burden to

itself and those around.

The following rules have been compiled from experience with hundreds of cases. They are now sent to you with the earnest request that you should study them carefully, and act on them.

(1) Treat the blind child as you would a sighted one. Teach it as soon as possible to use its limbs and brain. As soon as it begins to use its hands give it all sorts of things with which to play. The ear and the intellect can be soon aroused by talking and singing, and by musical toys.

(2) Teach the child to walk at the same age as you would the seeing child.

(3) Never leave your child for any length of time alone and unoccupied in the same place, but insist that it go through the rooms of the house, and later, into the garden or yard, and gradually into all the immediate environment that surrounds it. By being taught to touch things it will gradually come to know all that surrounds it.

(4) As soon as possible teach the child to dress and undress, to wash itself, to comb its hair, to take care of its clothes; and when at table to use properly spoon, fork and knife. A blind child should do all these things as well as a seeing child; but you must be patient and give the child much practice in doing such things because it cannot learn by observation.

(5) Watch carefully the child's personal appearance and bearing. It cannot see how others act and so readily acquires habits which are disagreeable to its companions. Some of the most common mannerisms of blind children are rocking the body, twisting the head about, sticking

the fingers into the eyes, distorting the face, swinging the arms, shaking and hanging the head in walking, and bending over in sitting. As soon as you observe such practices in your child you should set yourself with patience but determination to break them up, and with gentleness and firmness, to rectify them. Once they become habits, years of schooling will not undo the mischief.

(6) Permit the blind child to play as much as possible with seeing children and to romp often with them out-of-doors. Take your child walking frequently and direct it in some simple, physical exercise. If it is obliged to sit still, you should at least give it balls, pebbles, blocks, a doll, a harmonica, or some other toy which appeals to touch or to hearing.

(7) Let the child touch and measure everything possible so that it can get an idea of space and distance through touching, walking and measuring. To cultivate the sense of touch, so very important to the blind, give it all the different materials, such as wood, blocks, coins, etc., in its hands to feel.

(8) Allow the child to take part as early as possible in household duties. Allow it to string buttons or shells, to shell and pick over beans, peas, and nuts, to clean furniture and kitchen utensils, to wash dishes, to grind the coffee, to peel potatoes, to gather the fruit in the garden, to feed the hens, dogs, cats and other domestic animals. You can also occupy the child happily in easy handiwork such as winding yarn, braiding the hair, and in coarse knitting. You will be surprised what a blind child can learn if only the trouble is taken to teach it.

(9) Speak with your child frequently, for, since it cannot read the loving care which is written on your face, it has a special need of hearing your voice. Ask the child frequently what it hears, and feels, and encourage it to ask many questions as to what is going on around it.

(10) Take care what you say before your child, for the blind child is more attentive to all that it hears than the seeing child is, and consequently it retains it better also.

(11) Never express regret, in its presence, at its blindness. Never allow others to do so. Such sympathy, though well meant, is apt to develop melancholy and self-pity. Encourage it to be happy and bright, to do its work with spirit and pleasure, that in later years it may become independent of outside assistance.

(12) Give the child a chance to exercise its memory; a good memory will be found invaluable later on. Have it commit to memory proverbs,

poems, and stories which it enjoys. You will find that it will derive great pleasure from learning such things.

(13) A blind child can be given religious and moral instruction at as early an age as a sighted one; act accordingly.

(14) The training of the blind child from the very earliest years should be carried out with reference to its handicap. To commence with a blind child, eight years old, who has had no previous training is almost hopelessly late. Pre-school training and the earliest possible attendance at school are the only sure ways of preventing habits and mannerisms which later become tragic drawbacks to a person's normal associations.

As soon as the child reaches the age when it ought to go to school, send it to a School for the Blind and it will be taught well in all it ought to know.

To deny your child an education is to rob him of his birthright. Many fathers and mothers are reluctant to send their blind son or daughter away from home. If such parents are unable to provide any other means of education, such selfish objections should be bravely overcome in justice to the child, as the greatest service can be rendered him by sending him to a school where he will receive special training. The courses of study followed in most schools for the blind are exactly the same as in the public schools, with the single exception of art and music. A complete course of instruction in a school for the blind requires from eight to twelve years. It is not thought advisable to admit pupils before six or seven years of age except where the home environment is objectionable; but if some thought is given to the child's training along the lines outlined above, it may remain at home until eight years of age. Every effort is made to keep alive the child's interest in its home while it is at school and pupils are allowed to return home as often as possible. The general life in a school for the blind is a busy, and an active one, very different from what imagination often pictures it, and very different from the conditions under which the blind child or youth is compelled to live at home in the ordinary community without any regular course of training or instruction.

Indeed, it may safely be affirmed that it is hard to find any body of young people more happy, lively, intelligent, and self-respecting than the pupils of a properly administered school for the blind.

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